

Academy Building (Borden Block, Academy of Music)  
68-114 South Main Street  
Fall River  
Bristol County  
Massachusetts

HABS No. MA-1000

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MASS,  
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PHOTOGRAPHS

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Historic American Buildings Survey  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20243

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. MA-1000

## ACADEMY BUILDING (BORDEN BLOCK, ACADEMY OF MUSIC)

Location: 68-114 South Main Street, Fall River, Bristol County, Massachusetts

Present Owner: The Fall River Redevelopment Authority (August 1979)

Present Use: Vacant; offices to be remodeled; theater to be demolished.

Significance: The Academy Building was constructed by the Borden Family, textile entrepreneurs of Fall River. The prominent structure, with Ruskinian Gothic details, was designed by Hartwell and Swasey of Boston in 1875. The Academy of Music, located within the block, was a local cultural center, housing performances by nationally renowned actors and actresses as well as concerts, lectures and civic events. After World War I, the auditorium was used predominantly for movies. It was modernized in 1946, but retains a great deal of its original fabric.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1875. The Academy of Music opened its doors to the public on January 6, 1876.
2. Architect: The architects were Hartwell and Swasey, 28 Pemberton Square, Boston. H. W. Hartwell appears to have been in charge but, convalescing from surgery in 1875, he left the commission in the care of his partner, A. E. Swasey. The prominent Boston firm had already established a reputation in Fall River through the design of the Central Congregational Church and the Borden mansion at 48 Highland Avenue, both with Gothic details.
3. Original and Subsequent Owners: Important conveyances are as follows (reference is to the Records of the North District, Bristol County, Massachusetts).

2 August 1875 (85:141): Lydia Borden, widow of Nathaniel B. Borden, conveys the land and "the brick block thereon in the process of construction" to her three children, Simeon, Nathaniel Jr., and Louisa Borden Aldrich, for \$1.00 and other valuable considerations. The Bordens intended to finish the Borden Block in memory of their father.

29 February 1876 (85:537): The Borden's mortgaged a fourth part of the building to the Fall River Five Cents Savings Bank, (hereafter referred to as the Bank) for \$100,000. This was due to escalating costs largely attributable to foundation problems. This mortgage was paid on July 15, 1882. Another \$200,000 was borrowed on 28 November 1881, and returned on July 12, 1882 (104:494).

12 June 1882 (107:206:207): In order to meet their mortgage obligations, the Borden's sold their interest in the Borden Block, first selling 1/8 to William Lawton Slade of Somerset, and 1/8 still in the family to Jerome C. Borden.

14 June 1882 (107:218): Two days later, Slade borrowed another \$50,000 from the Bank. Jerome Borden borrowed \$37,500 the next day (107:209), which he paid in 1891 (107:211).

12 July 1882 (107:288, 290): The three original Borden owners divested themselves of their remaining half interest, 1/4 to John S. Breyton, and 1/4 to Robert T. Davis. Both mortgaged their new holdings on the same day for \$135,000 and \$110,000 respectively (107:291, 294).

15 March 1888 (107:220): The Bank seized the share of William Slade by foreclosure.

2 August 1910 (156:328,330): Charles L. Nichols of Worcester, who now owned Breyton's 1/4, Jerome Borden (1/8), Robert T. Davis (1/4) and the Fall River Five Cents Savings Bank all turned their interest over to a new sole owner, William J. Dunn. Mr. Dunn then mortgaged it to Mr. Durfee of the Safe Deposit and Trust Company for \$225,000.

The following information was obtained from the City of Fall River:

18 November 1939: After William J. Dunn's death, property conveyed to Joseph P. Dunn, Trustee on behalf of the children of William J. Dunn.

1946: The Academy of Music was leased to the Zeitz Theater Company. (See Alterations and Additions, below)

1947: Title changed to family holding company: Dunn Realty Corporation.

1963: Entire building sold by the Dunn Realty Corporation to Academy Building, Inc.

31 October 1973: Entire building acquired by Fall River Redevelopment Authority.

4. Builders and Suppliers: The builders were C. F. and J. M. Hull of Providence, Rhode Island. Their initial quotation of \$260,000 fell short of the actual costs due to unforeseen problems with ledge, sidewalks, the elevator, interior decoration, and plumbing. Some of these problems are documented in letters in the possession of the Fall River Historical Society. They resulted in the Borden's large mortgages and financial problems.

5. Alterations and Additions:

- a. Exterior changes: Exterior changes to the block as a whole are mostly confined to the street-level shops, which probably had cast iron storefronts similar to those now only found on the building's east (rear) elevation. Storefronts were not only changed but totally restructured in the twentieth century, judging from the massive redlead-primed steel members used.

b. Alterations to the Theater:

The Academy of Music reopened as a movie theatre on Wednesday, November 20th, 1946, after extensive renovations by Zeitz Theatres of Fall River, Inc., who had leased the building from the Dunn family, adding it to a family of theatres in New Bedford, Portland and Newport. A newspaper account on November 15th of that year describes the theatre as "redecorated and refurnished," and physical inspection confirms that alterations were not structural. Changes were as follows:

South Main Street Entrance and Marquee: The aluminum marquee, with red panels and a back-lighted program directory, dates from 1946 as does the aluminum cladding of the entry. The existence of an earlier canopy

or marquee can be deduced from the early cast lion's heads to which the marquee chains were presumably fastened. No other trace of this earlier feature remains.

An undistinguished aluminum ticket booth was placed in the street-level entrance at this time, since theatre tickets had hitherto been sold in the shop next door. Aluminum exit/entry doors bisect the floor mosaic in this small entry space. Before this renovation, street-level doors either existed outside the mosaic, along the street line (where any trace has been obliterated by the new marquee), or did not exist at all. The latter possibility, is supported by a row of original doors with locks at a landing between the street and the lobby level.

Upstairs Lobby and Theatre Interior: The principal interior changes were cosmetic. Most important was the installation of new seating at both the orchestra level and first balcony. Thirteen hundred seats were installed of which approximately 800-900 are still in place. The seating arrangement appears unchanged from the descriptions of the original theatre. The hollow steel seats are beige, of "streamlined" design, with raised embossing, rounded corners and edges, upholstered seats and backs, and wooden arm rests (birch) above the pressed metal. The first balcony seating is slightly different in detail.

Besides new seating the Zeitz Company installed new carpeting and repainted the theater. Blue gray was used on the woodwork and red was used on plastered surfaces. This color scheme was coordinated with the new carpeting. Newspaper accounts imply total recarpeting, but the ornate red carpet with a foliate motif at the orchestra level may date from the 19th century. The red carpet with black lines on the balconies, however, can certainly be attributed to the 1940's.

The second balcony was closed to the public in 1946. A non-permanent screen was hung from the flies of the theater and a small projection booth was installed there. The "Voice of the Theatre," a new General Electric sound system was installed. Air-conditioners described below were probably installed in the late 1950's.

Washrooms: Materials and fixtures used in renovation of the washrooms included asbestos floor tiles, cardboard walls and inexpensive white fixtures.

Chandelier: The only other significant element of the remodelling was the cleaning of the huge, central chandelier. According to the newspaper account: "The chandelier in the center, a mark of distinction in the past, has been renovated and polished until it blazes with a veritable sunburst when lighted." Presumably, this dominant element of the interior is not mentioned in the earliest accounts, which talk instead of gas jets at various locations. The chandelier was probably added in the early 20th century although no records of this addition have been located. Installation of the chandelier may have been associated with William J. Dunn's purchase and mortgage in 1910. (See above).

Exits: In 1946 fire escapes were added to the south and east walls of the theatre, facing the rear courtyard and Second Street respectively. New exit doors were opened to each of these two fire escapes from all levels, making a total of six new exits.

B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure:

1. The Opening: The Academy of Music opened its doors on January 6, 1876, boasting the second largest stage in Massachusetts. The opening program was the Theodore Thomas Orchestra. Ushers were drawn from the young scions of Fall River's most prominent families, including Jireh Borden, Billy Handcock, Billy Edgar, Levi Lawton, John Burrell, George Bamford. Music continued on the Academy's program, and O. Elton Borden brought the Boston Symphony Orchestra to Fall River every year in the 1880's, always at personal loss.
2. Drama and Theatre: The Academy's real fame, in the years from its opening to the First War, came from stage presentations. Such small cities as Fall River were regular stops for many theatre companies, brought in by the railroads recently developed to export the city's industrial wealth. Visits were almost always "One Night Stands," since longer engagements were seldom profitable. The manager's strategy was to book three or four separate attractions each week,

and he would split the gate 60/40 or 65/35 with the visiting company, allowing them the larger share. Typically, the program for the first two weeks of April, 1878, began with a Tuesday historical drama, "A Soldier's Trust," which was held over one day by popular acclaim. Thursday was left free, and Friday offered a lecture by Professor Marshall on "The Age of Gold," describing the history and manufacture of this precious metal. The second week offered one-night-stands of a light operetta, "Chimes of Normandy," and a melodrama, "A Celebrated Case," and a session with Dr. A Hastings, "the mysterious Indian physician who tells you your diseases without asking any questions."

Burlesque "leg shows" fared poorly in Fall River and drama and comedy did best. Operettas, especially Gilbert and Sullivan were favorites. The Board of Alderman banned Emily Soldend and her English Burlesque Company in the mid-1880's because tights and short dresses were to be displayed on the stage. Nevertheless, the Howard Atheneum Company, a forerunner of Vaudeville, played repeatedly, as did Charmion, a lovely lady who did a disrobing act on a trapeze (ending, of course, still fully dressed). The one-night-stand system encouraged repetition, and the identification of individual artists with a single play. The same actor would come year after year to do the same play, and the theatre would be packed with repeat audiences who knew every line.

Frank Mayo played Davy Crockett year after year to capacity houses, with everyone waiting for the scene in which he used his massive arm as a bolt for the door on which his enemies were pounding. When an excellent play, "Nordeck," was written just for him, it failed, and he went back to "Davy Crockett." Tom Kean was idolized as Richard III but no one wanted to see him as Richelieu, a role identified with the great Edwin Booth. James O'Neil's fame as Monte Christo allowed him to advertise in 1885, that "at every house I appear, the best seats bring \$1.00." In Fall River only the first three rows were priced at this high level, and the rest of the Orchestra sold at seventy-five cents. Mesteyer and Teresa Vaughan, a famed husband and wife team, played "Tourists in Pullman Car," which required the construction of a full car in section along the full width of the stage.

Most celebrated of the actors and actresses was Edwin Booth. Mr. Booth always took ninety percent of the gate, but his prestige was such that none questioned this. Lotta Crabtree, the celebrated "Miss Lotta", appeared many times at the Academy. She subsidized her brother Jack's investments in the local cotton business, and he lived in the city for many years before leaving to manage Miss Lotta's new Park Theatre in Boston. Sarah Bernhardt herself, on one of her last American tours, came to the Academy on March 6, 1917.

Other renowned actors and actresses who appeared at the Academy included John McCollough, who appeared in the "Gladiator" and in "Virginius", Joseph Jefferson, famous for his Rip Van Winkle, John Drew, Louis James, Lawrence Barrett, Madjesca, Maude Adams, Joe Howarth, Phoebe Cary, Denise Kellogg, Minnie Madden, Joe Murphy, Fannie Davenport, David Warfield, Mrs. Fiske, Otis Skinner, Mrs. Scott Siddons, William Redmond, Mrs. Barry, The Salvinis, Patti Feversham, all the Barrymores, Wilson Barrett, Barry Sullivan, Lillian Russell and E.H. Southern.

Some companies managed to go beyond the "one-night-stand" by offering variety at low prices. The Bennett and Moulton Opera Company started the trend to 10/20/30 companies (referring to the price range for seats, in cents), and played Fall River for a whole week every spring and fall. Such companies and variety shows held elaborate parades on their arrival, with all their actors and performers decked out in appropriate costumes. Bartholomew's Equine Paradox, a trained horse show, went so far as to lead the horses up the theatre's front stairs. Charley Hoyt, a noted playwright (The Rag Baby, Bunch of Keys, The Parlor Match, Temperance Town, Trip to Chinatown, The Tin soldiers, etc.), was often in Fall River. When he came with his new play, "Black Sheep" - which of course had nothing to do with sheep - his manager, Fred Wright, strolled all over town in the company of a black sheep with a bright red ribbon, going into stores, banks, and public buildings. Citizens of Fall River could hardly ignore the passing events at their theater.

The record attendance at the Academy of Music was set on the occasion of an appearance by the Lester and Allen Minstrels, with the great boxer John L. Sullivan as part of the group. The house was sold out, and 826 people crowded the standing-room only second balcony. This balcony sometimes featured wooden benches, and was reached by its own ground level entry. Admission was ten cents to a quarter, and the audience tended to be all male. So much tobacco was chewed that a residential-type gutter was added to the edge of the balcony. Tickets for the reserved seats were kept in a special glass-fronted cabinet which, during the day, was in the L.D. Wilbur & Co. clothing store, adjacent to the South Main Theatre entrance, where sales were made. At 7 P.M., the cabinet was moved upstairs, and the theatre's own box office opened.



A final interaction between theatre and community involved properties, or "props", the objects for stage sets which must be procured locally by travelling companies, and one-night stands made the collection of props quite critical. Local merchants loaned the bulk of these for advertising purposes, so that a little familiar Fall River was always on the stage, and the use of such recognizable items as the full-sized horse in front of Wooley's Harness Shop on South Main Street, always caused much excitement.

3. Social Events: Beginning with the inaugural Grand Ball on February 18, 1878, the Academy of Music became the center of Fall River's social life for more than twenty years. A removable dance floor was built and laid in sections, utilizing 14,000 board feet of wood. It covered the entire stage, ending at the rail of the parquet circle, and such was the slope of the floor that only the last two rows of seats had to be removed for it to be laid. Once it was down, the Auditorium became a vast dance floor surrounded by a horseshoe of comfortable seats from which to observe the goings-on. Balls became frequent, and workmen began to assemble the floor for the following night immediately after a stage performance, and to disassemble it right after the dance, often at four or five in the morning. On one occasion remembered by ex-manager Burrell, a show-dance-show sequence kept manager and workmen busy non-stop for two days and three nights.

The inaugural Grand Ball was attended by all Fall River and New Bedford society, with contingents from Providence, Taunton, and Newport as well. The guests were divided between "dancers" (more than 300), and "spectators" (close to 500), and these two groups entered through separate entries from street level.

In later years, the greatest annual event was always the ball of the Street Railway Employees, a very large and rambunctious group.

4. Politics: Fall River's political rallies were also often held at the Academy of Music, particularly the ones organized by State Republican Committee Chairman Henry Cabot Lodge. Along with Massachusetts Governor Benjamin F. Butler, frequent speakers were Thomas B. Reed, John L. Swift, Wendell Phillips, George F. Hoar, William W. Crapo, George Fred Williams, William E. Russell, George D. Robinson and John D. Long. Charles Stewart Parnell (1846-1891), the great Irish nationalist leader, came to speak in 1880. Robert G. Ingersoll (1833-1899), a fiery orator known as "the Great Agnostic" also came to speak at the Academy many times.

5. Spiritualism: During the 1880s, the Academy of Music was used as a stage for public seances. Spiritualist groups, usually performing on Sunday nights, apparently made no secret to theatre staff of their trap doors and secret wires, so fine as to be invisible from even a close distance. Others made their living by debunking spiritualism: showing how various tricks were performed on the stage.

C. Bibliography:

a. Primary and unpublished sources:

Records of Deeds: North Bristol Registry of Deeds, Fall River,  
Massachusetts.

Interview with Childs, Bertmann-Tseckares Associates of Boston,  
Architects for Adaptive Reuse.

b. Secondary and published sources:

Research was done in the archives of the Fall River Herald News,  
and scores of articles were located on the Academy of Music  
and the Borden Block. Of these, the most important were:

The Academy of Music in the Old Days, a guest column by Thomas R.  
Burrell, manager of the Academy in the 1880s, which appeared  
frequently in May and June of 1939.

Vaudeville Show Will be Held, unsigned, September 20, 1978.

Academy Renewal Recalls Age of Gold Events, Marion Flanigan,  
May 28, 1979.

The Academy Building, Will it Stand or Fall? Marion Flanigan,  
July 23, 1974.

Academy Preservation Plans, Marion Flanigan.

City Has Long Show Business History, Angus Bailey, October 17, 1978.

The Academy Theatre Renewed, unsigned, November 15, 1946.

c. Likely sources not yet investigated:

The Fall River Historical Society has some correspondence between  
Simeon Borden and the builders.

Prepared by: Maximilian L. Ferro  
The Preservation Partnership  
Natick, Massachusetts  
September 1979

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Academy Building (Borden Block) is a prominent Ruskinian Gothic structure which contains a fine example of America's elegant late 19th century theatres. The Academy of Music, within the structure, is a rare example of a surviving Gothic theatre interior.
2. Condition of fabric:
  - a. Exterior: very good.
  - b. Interior: fair.

### B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The Borden Block is 235'-6" long along South Main Street, 110'-6" long along Pleasant, and 197'-1" long along Second Street. A court is cut out of the otherwise almost rectangular building, measuring about 80'x48'. Within the structure, the rectangular Academy of Music measures 126'x 66'.

The entire complex can be seen as an "L" shaped office structure, four stories high, wrapped around the theater, which is four-and-a-half stories high. The long west elevation along South Main Street is divided into a central pavilion with flanking wings. The southern portion and the elevation contain the theatre entrance emphasized by a vertical composition of triple windows. The window bays, twenty-seven across this elevation, are grouped to create varying visual effects. The mass of the theatre is visible on the east elevation, where the auditorium is expressed as a large eight-bay volume, with blind windows three-stories high, and capped with a recessed clerestory just below the roof. Below the large "windows", pairs of porthole-windows light the dressing rooms.

2. Foundations: Foundation walls are of stone, going from eight to fourteen feet below grade, and providing a low basement under the whole structure. Walls are three feet thick.
3. Wall construction, finish and color: The Borden Block is a polychromatic composition of beige sandstone and deep red brick, rich in stylistic detail and ornamentation. Detail is Ruskinian, with elements of Venetian Gothic. At the fourth floor level, the west elevation is divided into definite parts by decorative colonettes. These occur at the corners of the central pavilion and its wings, and flanking the pediments which cap the center of the pavilion, the entrance of the theatre and section of the left wing which visually balance the theatre entry.

Above the theatre entrance, there is a vertical, three-story arrangement of narrow triple windows, with pilasters between windows on two floors, and colonettes on the fourth. The spandrels between the second and third floors are enriched by terra cotta tiles with gold-leaf ornament, and the panels between the third and fourth have carved medallions. Above the fourth floor, the pediment contains a sandstone medallion depicting the fight between two dragons. Such decorative work and carved medallions occur over the north entry, where there is a chimera or winged monster with a lion's body and serpentine tail.

The elegant North Entry, leading to the main stair hall of the office building, is probably similar to the original theatre entrance. Above an elegant matched-board dado, the wall is panelled with herringbone, matched boards and bold moldings. The soffit has similar panels. An outer vestibule area, similarly treated and once graced by a mosaic floor, has chamfered, engaged pilasters, with foliated capitals. Outer pilasters are cast iron, with acanthus leaf decoration.

The storefront to the left of the North Entry is a sensitive later addition. Its early 20th century leaded glass and copper cornice fit in well with the fabric of the building, although its steel beam structure betrays its later origin. The corners of the north facade are on a forty-five degree angle, emphasized with pediments and colonettes, and further enriched by two-story projecting bay windows over the entrances.

The East elevation retains its original storefront treatment, consisting of brick piers with elaborate sandstone capitals (already described) at major intervals, infilled with cast iron pilasters or columns, and plate glass. The rear wall of the Auditorium on the east elevation has less polychromy and ornament, but is distinguished by the intricate textures of its brickwork. False windows are infilled with textured panels, and superb brick corbelling enriches both the cornice of the theatre and its clerestory immediately above. Most brickwork is simple English bond.

4. Structural system: The Academy Building was built with a mixed structural system, employing stone and brick load bearing walls, cast iron columns, and heavy timber floor and roof framing. The roof above the Auditorium is massively trussed in wood with iron tension rods, and the balconies are wood framed but supported on cast iron colonettes. At the first floor level, the massive iron columns are 14'-7" high, while the slender balcony colonettes rise 24' from orchestra floor to second balcony.
5. Porches, stoops, balconies, and bulkheads: There is only one balcony, now partially hidden by the aluminum marquee added in 1946. Directly above the theatre entrance on South Main Street, it is supported by two massive double consoles on which stand pier-like newells, topped by pyramidal pinnacles. Between these two anchors are eight sections of cast iron balustrade, two of which are missing.

6. Chimneys: Tall chimneys, topped by unusual horned capstones flank the central pavilion of the west elevation. A much larger smoke-stack is at the inner corner of the rear courtyard, presumably serving the heating system.
7. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: Nothing original remains of the theatre entry. The North entry with much original fabric, now has aluminum doors. Side doors, where still extant, tend to have single full height glass inserts and egg-and-dart moldings, suggestive of a 20th century date.
  - b. Windows: Windows are trimmed with beige sandstone, and vary in treatment. For the second floor, they are usually topped by pointed arches, whereas on the third floor the arches are more shallow. Fourth floor windows have flat sandstone lintels with decorative corner blocks. The false fenestration of the Theatre, on the east elevation is of great interest. There are eight three-story blind windows, each above a pair of porthole openings, and each with a pair of clerestory lights above. From the right, the first window has an operable sash in its upper half to light the emergency egress stairs, as does the last bay to the left. The second "bay" from the right is actually two pairs of large doors, no doubt once used to hoist props up to the stage, (presumably only the lower pair of doors were operable). Additional fire escapes used to rise to the second balcony entered via a small door up at the first cornice level.

On the office elevations, sash are one-over-one at second floor level, and two-over-one on the upper two floors. Windows are grouped in different rhythms on the west elevation, adding visual complexity to this long facade.
8. Roof: Roofs are flat, with the exception of the theatre roof, which is pitched, and the central pavilion of the west elevation, which is hipped. The material of the flat roofs is unknown. The pitched roofs are covered with slate. There is a medallioned stone cornice on the west, north and part of the east elevations and corbelled brick cornices on the rear (east) elevation of the theatre. Water disposal is mostly internal, with visible outboard guttering only on the east elevation.
9. Other features: The 1946 Marquee is of aluminum with colored panels and blacklighting, with the word "Academy" visible from both directions on South Main Street.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. Basement: The basement consists of eight independent cellars relating to the spaces above, and separated by stone bearing walls.
- b. First floor: The first or ground floor is divided into retail spaces. Stores flank the North entry, and four large commercial spaces traverse the entire building from South Main to Second Street. The southwest corner of the block houses two smaller stores.
- c. Second floor: The second floor, continues the serving spaces for the theatre. Under the stage was a workshop, with direct egress to the street, flanked by two rooms to the west, and three dressing rooms to the east. This workshop could be reached by the stairs at both front corners of the stage. A long corridor leads to four more dressing rooms along the east wall, and one storage room across the hall from them. All seven dressing rooms have sinks, and separate toilets are provided.

The rest of the second floor consists of two outer bands of offices, separated from the Auditorium by an "L" shaped corridor, with the main stairway from the north entry at the short end of the L, and the Auditorium stairs at the other.

- d. Third floor: The third floor contains the main level of the Auditorium. The 67'x38' stage overlooks a horseshoe seating arrangement, with a "parquet circle" of seats surrounding a sloping orchestra floor. Washrooms occupy the triangle spaces formed by the rear of the horseshoe and a 13'-2" band at the rear of the hall is occupied by a symmetrical arrangement of stairs down and up to the foyer and the balconies. The balance of the floor is occupied by offices as already described.
- e. Fourth floor: The office arrangement is similar to the second and third floors but without the grand stairs at the theatre entry, which rises only three floors. The first balcony mirrors the parquet circle, and was formerly called the dress circle.

2. Stairways:

- a. Arrangement: Egress from the Academy of Music was excellently planned, with interior stairs at every corner of the Auditorium. The two stairways at the front corners of the stage connect all levels of the theatre to the area below the stage, where one

can exit directly to grade by the stage door. The staircase on the southeast (rear) corner of the Auditorium also exits at grade on Second Street, and is accessible from all levels. The graceful stair above the ticket booth, in the southwest corner of the Auditorium, exits at the theatre foyer, necessitating the further interior flight down to the South Main Street main entrance. In addition to these four interior stairs, fire escapes were added leading down to the grade from all levels of the Auditorium on both its east and its south walls.

- b. Description: Stairs generally have wood dados with matched board infill, plaster walls, round wood handrails, gas jets, and solid matched board parapets instead of open railings. More decorative stairways are described in the following section.

### 3. Theatre-related spaces:

- a. Street level entry: This entrance was remodelled in 1946 with a marquee, aluminum trim and doors, and a ticket booth (see Alterations and Additions above). Originally, this small exterior space with splayed sides had a tall baseboard, a bold chair rail, and a matched board dado. There was heavy panelling with herringbone designs above the chair rail. Originally, there was no ticket booth at this level, and tickets were sold in an adjoining store before the performance, or at the upper ticket booth (see below) on the night of the show. The mosaic floor in the entry is composed of a black and white field bordered by a black Greek fret with corner blocks of concentric black and white squares. Inside the white field, there is a double black-line border containing the word "Academy" in lettering sometimes known as "Hollywood script". To the left of the aluminum doors is an elevator with a wide black metal enframement labeled in gold leaf. The elevator door consists of a large glass and wire pane surrounded by a border of smaller panes. Across from the elevator is a solid closet door.

The stairs rise quite steeply opposite the aluminum doors, broken by a shallow landing. At this landing, a row of doors swings outward above the descending steps, and could be fixed in the open position before a show. Presumably, any original lower doors (if they existed) were located outside of the present aluminum doors, at the edge of the mosaic. The stair walls are treated with the same dado as the entry. Large wooden handrails run the length of the stair. A metal center rail is a later addition. The steps are thirteen feet wide. Heat was provided in the stair space by large japanned foot grilles with geometric designs, suggesting that street level doors may have existed.

- b. Second floor entry: The main entrance to the theatre is on the second floor. The stairwell on this level is flanked by four massive chamfered wooden piers topped by elaborate scroll brackets which support the beams for the stairs to the upper levels. The stairs to the third floor begin as symmetrical divided flights and then join at the first landing and continue directly over the first flight of stairs. The stairs have turned balusters and chamfered newels with incised decoration.

The entrance to the theatre is opposite the stairs, and consists of four wide doors that can be folded back to create a ten-foot wide opening. The massive doors have acorn finials and plate glass inserts. To either side of this entrance narrow walls are set on angles containing doors to enclosed stairways. The stair on the right of the theatre entrance leads down to the basement, and that on the left leads to the upper ticket booth and office and the balconies. These four panel doors have elaborate cast brass hardware. To the sides of these doors are niches that formerly contained statues. From the niches, the walls run perpendicular to the theatre entry. Hallways bisect these walls. They are finished with three foot oak dados and four foot mirrors. Doors are oak with transom lights.

- c. Inner foyer: Inside the second floor theatre doors a set of stairs lead to the auditorium. The wall on the left is apsidal with a door and flanking window which served as a ticket booth. It was connected to the stair leading to the ticket booth and office on the next level (see below). The walls in this area are paneled and the dado and rails are identical to those on other stairs. The four doors to the auditorium are glazed with a vertical pane, small square panes at each corner, and narrow long panes along the sides.
- d. Ticket booth and office: This is located on the stairs leading to the balconies, entered through a door to the left of the second floor theatre entrance. The booth has a door with a single pane of glass surrounded by egg and dart molding. The opening for ticket sales is a double hung sash window. Tickets were sold from this booth or from the window within the theatre foyer just before performances prior to installation of the street level booth in 1946.
- e. Auditorium: The auditorium is horseshoe shaped with two deep balconies. The large stage dominates one third of the auditorium space. The entry to the auditorium and the balcony stairs are within a rectangular section at the rear of the horseshoe. These are screened by a wall ornamented with four columns with elaborate capitals. Each column visually supports a long bracket of Eastlake character which spans from the curved beam that runs along the edge of the horseshoe.



The main orchestra seating is flanked on three sides by the seats of the parquet circle. The parquet circle is separated from the foot rear aisle by a low match-boarded wall. This is paralleled by the rear wall dado which is punctuated by pilasters that echo the balcony colonnettes. The orchestra has fourteen rows of seats. The parquet circle surrounding it is eight rows deep. A parquet rail separates the orchestra from the parquet circle. It is of varying heights, higher near the stage, and consists of two foot gothic colonettes on a solid base. Ten iron columns are set into the parquet rail and support the first balcony.

The balconies have intricate curved brass rails consisting of "woven" brass rods with rosettes between. There are approximately three hundred seats in the first balcony (originally called the dress circle). The second balcony contained narrow benches and standing room and once accommodated over eight hundred people. The first balcony is reached from stairs to the right of the auditorium doors, which turn at a right angle at the landing to enter the center aisle of the balcony. Scroll-sawn railings and gothic columns with foliate capitals ornament the stairs. At the rear of the first balcony is a small foyer with access to a fire escape and to the stairs leading to the ticket booth. The second balcony can be reached from the ground floor level and from the stairs that lead from the ticket booth to the first balcony.

The proscenium arch consists of a concave groove with stylized acanthus leaf wood trim. An upper curtain with trompe d'oeil swags and tassels painted in red and pink may be original. Splayed walls surrounding the proscenium contain balconies with gothic arched openings. These are entered via the exit stairs from the first balcony. These splayed walls terminate in ovolo moldings and a flat band of decorative trim surrounds the entire square proscenium.

A large tiered crystal chandelier hangs from a dodecagon on the ceiling of the auditorium. This consists of twelve trapezoids separated by raised wooden moldings. Four of these contained canvases of draped muses, and the others are painted with wreaths and putti. Ventilation grilles on the ceiling contain decorative silhouettes.

#### 4. Lighting:

- a. Auditorium: Gas lighting was originally employed for house lights, stage, fly, wing and footlights. Two men were stationed in the flies to extinguish potential fires. The gas lighting was eventually replaced by a crystal chandelier. Small cast bronze fixtures with floral designs containing three bulbs light the balconies. Single bulbs line the edge of the beams that define the perimeter of the auditorium.

- b. Exit stairs: Some original gas jets are present, although electric fixtures are in place.
  - c. Foyers and entries: Electric fixtures in this area are shallow metal, of "streamline" design, and probably date from the 1946 theater remodelling.
5. Heating and plumbing: Heating equipment includes floor registers with arabesque designs and large radiators with cast convector tubes (dating from ca. 1900). Men's and women's small wash rooms at the back of both balconies have gothic doors. There is little historic fabric surviving in these.

D. Site:

General setting and orientation: The long South Main Street (containing the theatre entrance) elevation of the Academy Building faces west. The theater is "wrapped" by offices on the west and north sides, and exposed on the east side, on Second Street.

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PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

The Academy Building was recorded for the Historic American Buildings Survey by the Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Fall River Redevelopment Authority in compliance with Executive Order 11593 and a Memorandum of Agreement with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation to mitigate the adverse effect of a downtown redevelopment project. The building will be rehabilitated using the benefits provided by the Tax Reform Act of 1976 with the exception of the Academy of Music section, which will be demolished. The drawings were prepared by Chia-Ming Sze, Sandra C. Auchincloss, John A. Sweeney, Myron D. Hartford, Jr., and Penelope Prutsalis of Chia-Ming Sze, Architects, Inc., in 1976. They were edited by Richard Cronenberger of the HABS staff in 1980. Photographs were taken by William W. Owens in September 1979. The written data was prepared by Maximilian L. Ferro of the Preservation Partnership in Natick Massachusetts in September 1979. It was edited and prepared for transmittal to the Library of Congress by Emily J. Harris of the HABS staff in April 1980.